



Chopin In Paris: The Life And Times Of The Romantic Composer

By Tad Szulc

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Born in Poland in 1810, Chopin emigrated to Vienna at age eighteen—and then to Paris, where from 1831 to 1849 he would spend almost half of his brief and tumultuous life. In Paris his extraordinary powers would reach their height and he would shine among the immensely talented writers, painters, and musicians who were working there and defining their era. Chopin's other acquaintances ranged from Rothschild to Marx—and it was here that he began his long and stormy relationship with the novelist George Sand. In *Chopin in Paris*—a *New York Times* Notable Book—Tad Szulc brings to life this complex, contradictory genius, and re-creates an unsurpassed epoch of European history, culture, and music.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Frederic Chopin was in many ways a contradictory figure: a passionately patriotic Pole, he left his country for good at the age of 21; frail and almost sexless, he was famous for a seven-year love affair with the novelist George Sand; shy, lonely, and retiring, he was inevitably surrounded by friends and admirers. In *Chopin in Paris*, biographer Tad Szulc has produced a dishy account of Chopin's most creative and tempestuous period, his 18-year sojourn in France. It's also a portrait of a unique time, when musical and artistic luminaries such as Chopin, Balzac, Hugo, Liszt, Berlioz, Delacroix, and Schumann ran in the same heady Parisian circles.

What it's *not* is a detailed study of Chopin's music. The author of critically praised books about Fidel Castro and Pope John Paul II, Szulc sets out in search of Chopin the man, "the human dimension" he finds missing in other, more musically oriented biographies. What he finds is not always attractive; tortured through much of his life by physical and psychological illness, Chopin emerges as an often fussy, distant, manipulative man, as well as something of a snob. It's a tribute to his genius as a composer, Szulc writes, that he was befriended by some of the greatest minds of his age, including the larger-than-life figure of George Sand: "Fryderyk Chopin gave the world a treasure in music. The world gave Chopin a treasure in human beings." Commendably, Szulc refrains from editorializing about the composer's life and habits, in particular Chopin's break with Sand. Instead, he allows his wealth of primary sources--including diaries, memoirs, letters, and Chopin's own brief journal--to speak for themselves.

From Library Journal

Political reporter and biographer Szulc (*Fidel*, LJ 1/87) based this biography of Chopin's adult years on correspondence and diaries in Polish and French as well as published sources in several languages. Liberally supplied quotations add liveliness to the portrait, but because of gaps in the record (many letters were lost or destroyed) and because Chopin often shielded himself from intimacy with others, emphasis is on Chopin's public persona and his "times." Szulc concentrates on Chopin's relationships with people, leaving discussions of his music to other writers. He relies heavily on earlier biographies for assessment of Chopin's character but makes some speculative judgments of his own, particularly regarding Chopin's sexuality. A supplement to George Marek and Maria Gordon-Smith's *Chopin* (LJ 9/15/78), with useful information, journalistically presented for a general audience. ?Bonnie Jo Dopp, Univ. of Maryland Lib., College Park
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From [Booklist](#)

Former *New York Times* diplomatic correspondent Szulc, author of numerous books on political topics, has shifted gears with this biography of Chopin. He focuses on the artist's most creative period: his 18 years in Paris. Szulc has reconstructed Chopin's life through letters from family and his longtime lover, the feminist writer known as George Sand. Other contributions come from prominent diarists among the expatriate Polish community in France at the time. What emerges is a detailed and often engrossing picture of Paris at the height of the romantic era. Szulc expertly reconstructs parties, performances, and holidays featuring the era's most famous artists--Balzac, Hugo, Berlioz, Lamartine, Liszt, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Bellini, and Rossini. Szulc notes at the outset that this is a study of Chopin's life, not his music, and sometimes the book suffers from overly nuanced descriptions of events. In the end, Szulc should be applauded for reanimating a fascinating composer and a dynamic era. *Ted Leventhal*

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